

## Duxbury's Greenbelts

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### SPECIAL TO THE CLIPPER

The concept of greenbelts has been around for centuries with roots even in the Old Testament where a greenbelt was proposed to surround the Levite towns in the land of Israel. That's going back some. But the idea of greenbelts was not limited to Jewish history; Muhammad in the seventh century prohibited the cutting of trees within a 12 mile strip around the Arabian city of Medina. Some confuse greenbelt with green space. A typical greenbelt provides a contiguous habitat for wild plants and animals and protects natural or semi-natural environments. A green space could be a ball field or picnic area. Greenbelts provide access to the countryside for both urban and suburban dwellers and protect the unique character of communities as widely different as Toronto, Canada and our own Duxbury. Here in Duxbury we have a greenbelt plan that was first proposed by the Conservation Commission in 1969 and supported by the voters at the 1970 Town Meeting as part of the very first Open Space Article. It has been modified and added to over the years by subsequent Conservation Commission proposals and supporting votes from other Town Meetings. The town's first acquisition under this plan was the 32-acre Whiton property on the North side of Temple Street, sandwiched between cranberry bogs and reservoirs owned by Stanley Merry. During the late '60's and early '70's Duxbury was blessed by having a group of forward thinking environmentalists heading up its Conservation Committee including Lansing H. Bennett, M.D., William P. Ellison, Mary V. Dunmore, Barbara H. Mc-Closky, Charles A. Lane, C. Graham Hurlburt, Walter G. Prince, Nancy A. Gesner and Frances C. Rogerson, Jr. They had vision, a great plan and the collective ability to convince the town to embrace their ideas. These stalwarts identified over 400 parcels of land that fell into the parameters they established for interesting and valuable conservation land and they walked nearly all of them in the year leading up to the 1970 March Town Meeting. Their efforts were successful; the town voted to spend slightly over \$1 million dollars for the Conservation Lands catalogued in the article.

To fully understand why this group of environmentalists so fervently embraced the open space project, you must remember that Route 3 had sliced through the center of Duxbury only a few years before on its way to the Cape. The character of Duxbury rapidly faced change as new residents flooded in on the highway and town services and facilities had to expand to keep pace. Land prices began to skyrocket, developers scrambled to buy buildable lots, summer cottages were transformed into mansions and open space was under siege. The Duxbury greenbelt plan was further strengthened in 2000 when the Commonwealth under Governor Celluci created the Community Preservation Act (CPA) and Duxbury became one of the first towns to reap its benefits with the purchase of additional land using CPA matching funds. Duxbury actually has three Greenbelts, the Eastern, Central and Western Greenbelts, all of which run North to South, all roughly following the course of a major watershed. Many cranberry bogs feature prominently within these Greenbelts because bogs always exist where water is available. Some bogs in Duxbury were created from swamp in the mid 1800's. Understanding the three greenbelts and their waterways can be confusing unless you have access to a map that shows all the many brooks, streams and rivers that flow through our beautiful town. Take the Eastern Greenbelt as an example. It includes the Wright Reservoir, which feeds eventually into the Green Harbor River in Marshfield. It also includes West Brook, which exits North Hill Marsh, flows into a pond off Tremont Street, becomes Duck Hill River and then becomes the Back River and enters Duxbury Bay. The Duxbury marsh accounts for over 1,000 acres of the eastern greenbelt. The Bluefish River originates from three branches in the Millbrook, Hounds Ditch and Depot Street areas and it too is part of the eastern greenbelt as is Island Creek, which originates from Island Creek Pond and flows to Hicks Point where it exits into Kingston Bay. When you plot all those rivers, creeks and streams and take into account the watersheds that feed them you see that even as they go in different directions they form a contiguous band of green and very wet land running North to South across the eastern side of Duxbury.

In the western greenbelt are found Pine Brook, which flows, from Upper and Lower Chandler Mill Ponds, Hall's Brook, Bassett Brook and Mile Brook, all of which feed the Jones River Watershed in Kingston along with Berry Brook. The northerly section of the western greenbelt includes Phillips Brook, Keene Brook and an unnamed branch originating in the Loring cranberry bogs off East Street. All of these plus their bogs, marshes and reservoirs converge near the intersections of Temple and Keene Streets and the Camp Wing Conservation Area to join their waters with the South River and flow through Marshfield to the Atlantic.

The central greenbelt begins in the north at Whiton Woods, roughly follows Route 3 and includes part of the South River watershed. Some have described it as the center diagonal in a capital N running almost from the northern top

of the western greenbelt towards the southern end of the eastern greenbelt. In addition to the aesthetic appeal of the scenic waterways within Duxbury's Greenbelts, their meandering flows also serve the critically important need of recharging our aquifer while at the same time providing safe, wooded wildlife corridors. Some of the rivers, streams and creeks also provide summer homes and breeding grounds during smelt and herring runs and eels happily exist in the brackish waters of tidal creek zones. Native populations of brown and brook trout find a perfect breeding environment in the cold, spring fed waters of Phillips Brook. These waters of exceptional quality are also important as they flow into Duxbury and Kingston Bays in supporting waterfowl as well as recreational and commercial fishing and what are fast becoming Duxbury's world famous oyster harvests. Whenever lands become available that can complete or add to Duxbury's three Greenbelts the Conservation Commission attempts to compete with builders to add them to open space rather than see them developed and lost forever.

And the work of that excellent team headed by Dr. Lansing Bennett thankfully goes on.



The Greenbelt plan was first proposed by the Conservation Commission in 1969.



Conservation Conversation